

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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847-691-6744 (cell) *Kirk-Bean-Durbin language fully integrates Navy/VA personnel and resources*

Establishes joint operating fund and eliminates TRICARE copays

WASHINGTON – By a vote of 281 to 146, the U.S. House of Representatives approved language authored by U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk and Melissa Bean, and U.S. Senator Richard Durbin, that completes the merger of Navy and VA personnel and resources at Lovell Hospital in North Chicago. The legislation, attached to the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2647), now goes before the Senate for final consideration and signature by the president.

“We scored a great victory for northern Illinois veterans when we stopped the closure of the North Chicago VA Medical Center and combined it with Naval Clinic Great Lakes” Congressman Kirk said. “Before this first-ever joint Navy/VA hospital opens next year, the Department of Defense and the VA needed the statutory authority to seamlessly move personnel and resources between the two departments. The Kirk-Bean-Durbin language helps us clear the final hurdle to make our new veterans’ hospital a reality.”

The legislative language, modeled off of a bill introduced earlier this year by U.S. Reps. Kirk and Bean (H.R. 1267), extends the VA/Department of Defense Health Care Sharing Incentive Fund until 2020 from its current expiration date of 2010. This account is funded by both the VA and Department of Defense, providing Lovell Hospital the greatest flexibility to operate the facility jointly. The legislation also designates Lovell Hospital as a military treatment facility, a technical designation needed to prevent military retirees under the TRICARE system from being forced to make costly co-payments when they receive care at the joint facility.

After a Washington-based consultant recommend the closure of the VA hospital nearly a decade ago, Congressman Kirk and local veterans saved the facility by combining it with Naval Hospital Great Lakes. In 2003, Kirk won approval for the first phase of the integration project, moving the Navy’s mental health unit into the North Chicago VA. Two years ago Kirk participated in the opening of a \$13 million joint Navy-VA emergency room and surgical facility. Last year, Congressman Kirk worked with the Department of Defense to name the new hospital after Lake Forest resident, Apollo astronaut and national hero, Captain James A. Lovell, Jr.

The facility is expected to open in 2010 and will save an estimated \$160 million through the projected 40-year life of the hospital. The new center will care for over 100,000 veterans, retirees, sailors and their families. Lovell Hospital will also employ hundreds of Lake County residents.

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